DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 185 986 IR 008 315

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TITLE The Role of Sound Recordings in Library Collections.
PUB DATE 79
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Conference of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutes (45th, Copenhagen, Denmark, August 27-September 1, 1979).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Audiodisc Recordings; *Audiotape Recordings; College Libraries; *Library Acquisition; *Library Collections; *Public Libraries

ABSTRACT

This discussion of the role of sound recordings--phonodiscs, tape cassettes and cartridges--in public and university libraries provides a brief review of types of collections and criteria for choosing materials, the variety of uses patrons may make of such collections, selection tools and patron input for collection building, in-house listening facilities and circulation problems, organization and care of the collection, and patron access to the collection. (JEG)

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IFLA Council 1979

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The Role of Sound Recordings in Library Collections

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Collections of sound recordings are an accepted part of the holdings of most public and university libraries. Apparently it all started back in 1913 or 1914 when a resident of St. Paul, Minnesota, gave his local library a small collection of phonograph records. The Detroit (Michigan) Public Library has had recordings for sixty years. The first collections were of 78 rpm phonodiscs, but most consist now of 33 1/3 rpm phonodiscs, tape cassettes, and cartridges. Some reference and research collections include 78's as well as wire and tape reel-to-reel recordings. And some collections stressing popular music include 45 rpm phonodiscs.

Acquiring sound recordings should be done with the library's clientele and the library's aims and goals in mind just as much as for other library materials. A written acquisition policy will help in selection. A university music department's record collection will be chosen to support its curriculum. But many universities also have browsing collections, general in scope, and similar to the collections usually found in public libraries. The larger the collection in a public library, the more likely it is to be musically sophisticated and to run the gamut of what is available on records.

The library's patrons' use of recordings is almost as varied as their use of printed materials. A great deal of the use can be classified as recreational; but a large proportion is purposeful. The music student studying a composition can listen to how professionals interpret the piece. The individual using foreign language instructional records may be doing so to supplement his class assignments. He may be a person planning a trip and wanting to learn words and phrases of the language of the country which he will be visiting or an immigrant wanting to learn the language of the country to which he has just moved. Yet again, he may be an individual needing to improve his pronunciation or enunciation. He may be a Boy Scout studying the Morse Code. She may be a bride-to-be wanting a recording of organ music to be played at her wedding. A student studying a play by Shakespeare, Shaw, or Ibsen often finds listening to the play is easier than reading it or supplements his reading of the text by enlivening the drama. Or the person who borrows the recording may be going to a drama festival where he will be seeing the play and wants to become familiar with the text ahead of time. Persons studying secretarial skills find it helpful to use recordings of dictated material for practice purposes. The person wanting background music for a party or a fashion show, the individual needing sound effects for a play or a radio program, the person taking dance lessons and wanting music to practice by or instructions on how to do the dance, all can find what they need on recordings. The actor wanting to acquire a nationality or regional accent may find his answer on records. The student studying history will find it comes alive when he listens to a recording of speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr., Winston Churchill, or David Ben-Gurion. The busy housewife, unable to attend physical education classes may use

recordings which tell her how to exercise at home. The businessman and the salesman will hopefully profit from recorded lectures on motivation and salesmanship.

When record collections were first introduced in libraries, one had to go to a record shop and listen to the record. Now record reviews are so generally available that a library can do its record selection on the basis of published reviews. Notes, the quarterly publication of the Music Library Association, contains in each issue an Index of Record Reviews. Symbols indicate the reviewers' opinions and currently reviews in eighteen periodicals are indexed. A cumulation of these summaries of reviews covering the period 1949 to 1977 has been edited by the compiler, Kurtz Myers, and has just been published by G. K. Hall & Co., Boston, Massachusetts.

There are a number of tools which will help the librarian lacking a musical background build a well-rounded collection of compositions in the fields of classical and jazz music. It is much more difficult to select recordings of popular music, the pieces which are played frequently on the radio for a while but then disappear from the air waves. One cannot possibly buy all the recordings of this type of music which are issued. The popular music group in vogue today is often quickly forgotten. Some libraries do not buy any music of this kind because of the short life span of so much of it. But in most libraries, patrons expect to find it, and some are annoyed when the current top best-sellers are not available.

Some young adult librarians have used recordings as a means of getting young people into the library. Individuals who are not print-oriented are often interested in pop music. One device that can be used is to let a group of young library patrons select the pop music recordings the

library is to purchase within set financial limits. This involves these young adults and gives them a sense of pride in the collection and an affinity with the library.

The young adult who is a non-reader very often enjoys comedy records. If you notice him listening to a recording of W. C. Fields or of Abbott and Costello, he may also be interested in a book about them, especially one that is mostly still from their films accompanied by dialogue. Hand him the volume; he may not have realized that the library had such books.

Most libraries which have collections of recordings will have listening facilities for patrons' use. Usually these are table units into which one to four earphones can be plugged. Some libraries have been designed with individual listening rooms, similar to enclosed carrels, but such rooms do not permit the desirable supervision possible with an open area. Better control of the condition of the recordings is possible if the listening facilities are so designed that staff play the recordings on machines wired to listening units and the patrons sign out for earphones. But such a setup is expensive from the standpoint of equipment and staff time and is out of the question for most small libraries. If a reference collection of recordings is used, it pretty much prevents their being damaged. But if the recordings are also available for borrowing, they may well get scratched, broken, or warped while checked out of the library. Unfortunately there are always patrons who steal or maliciously damage phonograph needles and earphones as well as recordings. A damaged recording is usually of less use than a book which has been marked up or has had some plates removed.

Having a collection of recordings means having special shelving.

Shelving which is twelve inches deep is necessary, and it should preferably be of the type that has dividers every four or six inches to keep the phonodiscs as upright as possible. Bins such as those used in record shops are another possibility. Cassettes and eight-track stereo cartridges are so easily pocketed or slipped into handbags that it is best to keep them behind the desk and have patrons ask for them by name or number. This usually necessitates a special catalogue for them.

Few libraries can afford cleaning recordings after every use, but a visual inspection of phonodiscs from time to time is desirable to check for scratches, dirt, and nicks and to be sure that the right record is in the appropriate jacket.

There are libraries which shelve their record collection by the manufacturer's numbers, but usually a classification scheme is followed. It may be the same scheme as used for the book collection, but often it is a home-grown one or a combination of an original one for the recordings of music and the book collection's scheme for the spoken recordings. There are libraries which interfile the catalogue cards for the recordings collection with those for the library's book collection, but the more desirable practice is to have a separate catalogue for recordings. We all know that some patrons find a card catalogue difficult to use, and for these individuals it is very complicated when the cards for recordings are interfiled with those for books.

Although a catalog is essential for a collection of recordings receiving sophisticated use, it is not really needed for a browsing collection. However, in the latter case the staff will probably wish to have a simple record of what is in the collection.

The collection in one branch library in Michigan located in a neighborhood of steel mill and sutomobile factory workers was built up on the theory that the majority of the potential patrons of the branch were not readers. The emphasis in book selection was on titles in which there were lots of illustrations. The same was done with the selection of periodicals. A television set was installed in the library. Film programs were scheduled regularly. And recordings were included in great number. It has been suggested that a recorded sound collection could be a substitute for a book collection in countries with a high rate of illiteracy. Certainly it is worth trying.